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Preparations for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Emerging issues containing additional material for further actions and initiatives for the preparation of the outlook beyond the year 2000

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. According to its multi-year programme of work in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women (Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/6 of 22 July 1996), the Commission on the Status of Women should identify emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men that require urgent consideration and make substantive recommendations thereon. The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/231 of 4 June 1998, requested the Secretary-General to provide, in the report on emerging issues to be submitted to the Commission at its forty-fourth session, additional material on further actions and initiatives for the preparation of the outlook beyond the year 2000. The present report was prepared in response to that mandate.

2. Since 1995, the Commission on the Status of Women has reviewed each of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. Considerable progress has been achieved in some critical areas of concern whereas existing and additional obstacles to gender equality have persisted in others. In its agreed conclusions on each critical area of concern, the Commission has made recommendations on concrete measures and effective instruments of public policy and planning to implement the Platform for Action. It has also focused to some extent on more fundamental changes in institutions and in behaviour and attitudes of individuals and groups. Moreover, there has been an emphasis on overcoming persistent obstacles and on intensifying efforts to use a more integrated, holistic approach to the achievement of gender equality, given the importance of the interrelationship between different critical areas of concern, such as the human rights of women, the critical role of women in decision-making, eradication of poverty and the importance of education and health.

3. In preparation for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" to be held at Headquarters from 5 to 9 June 2000, the need to focus on emerging issues and new challenges to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action became apparent. To that end, an international workshop, "Beijing +5 – Future Actions and Initiatives", was convened by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and hosted by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia at the United Nations House in Beirut, from 8 to 10 November 1999. The aim of the workshop was the elaboration of action-oriented recommendations for discussion by the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly.

4. In the context of trends of global change since 1995, the workshop assessed the impact of these trends on gender equality, development and peace in terms of the implementation of the Platform and recommended measures to address the emerging challenges. The topics and recommendations below have been elaborated by experts participating in the workshop.

II. Summary of presentations and discussions at the workshop

5. The experts to the workshop reviewed progress in the implementation of critical areas of concern as contained in the Beijing Platform for Action under the three key themes: (a) equality (including education, media, decision-making, the girl-child, institutional mechanisms and violence); (b) development (including poverty, economy, health, institutional mechanisms and environment) and (c) peace (including a discussion on violence and armed conflict). The review of progress revealed that human rights, one of the 12 critical areas of concern, emerged as an overarching approach embodying all these themes, thus providing the integrated framework within which the objectives of the Platform for Action are defined. The action-oriented recommendations of the participants set out in section III were cross-cutting and fell within this larger integrated framework.

A. Significant breakthroughs and achievements since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995

6. A dual approach to the empowerment of women had been embraced: the debate recognized women's rights as human rights as well the transformational potential of women to achieve gender equality and improve society, locally and globally.

7. A system of global governance on gender equality was emerging, based on a set of principles, norms, rules and institutional mechanisms (national and international), with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women at its core. The understanding of gender equality as a "common good" had also been accepted at the international level and, perhaps less fully, embraced at the national and regional levels.

8. The Beijing Conference had introduced a focus on the roles and responsibilities of men in working for gender equality, which implied changing roles and identities of women and men and addressing issues of masculinity.

9. The Platform had advanced the process of gender mainstreaming at all levels for gender equality, shifting the approach from "women in development" to "gender and development".

10. The Platform had given formal recognition to the roles of actors other than Government in promoting gender equality. The commitment of a number of actors had increased, including international organizations, civil society, political parties, the media and the private sector.

11. There was a rise of national and transnational women's networks, which were influencing the global gender agenda in the formulation of principles, norms and institutional mechanisms.

12. Violence against women, including domestic, societal and war-related violence, had been brought into the public arena and made a human rights issue.

B. The changed global context

13. All these breakthroughs had led to new legislation and an increased awareness of women's rights and gender equality, which, unfortunately, had not been matched by significant changes in attitudes and practices in key areas. Women's participation in economic and political life at decision-making levels was stagnating, new perceptions of gender identities and roles were evolving at the margins rather than in the mainstream and there was a persistent gap between legislation and enforcement as demonstrated in the field of violence against women. Additionally, in the five years since the Fourth World Conference on Women, the global context had changed, posing new challenges. Therefore, future actions and strategies needed to respond to these new realities.

14. In the new age of globalization, the policy of Governments had shifted in favour of openness of trade and financial flow. Policies calling for lighter regulation of industry, privatization of State-owned enterprises and lower public spending had characterized the programmes of Governments around the world. Liberalization policies coupled with technological advances in communications accelerated the impact of economic integration, eroding conventional boundaries, in particular that of the State.

15. Globalization had also been having an impact on cultural values and lifestyles. Populations around the world were being familiarized, through economic exchanges and exposure to advertising, the media and telecommunications, to a culture oriented towards material consumption. Additionally, globalization was tied to the momentous political changes of the present era such as the rise of identity politics, transnational civil society, new forms of governance and the universalization of human rights.

16. Globalization, information and communications technology had increased production, consumption and trade in some instances, but had also brought instability and risk in other cases. Governments had proceeded with deregulation without the introduction of new forms of regulation to ensure the observance of social protection and provision of needs. This had increased the risks of globalization for many social groups and led to widening economic and social inequalities between and within countries, exacerbating human vulnerabilities and insecurities. Poverty remained at the top of the agenda in many countries and the burden of increasing poverty had been disproportionately borne by women.

17. While globalization had brought some women greater economic opportunities and autonomy, others had been exposed to increased economic and social vulnerabilities. Although in many countries, female labour force participation rates had been rising while those of males had been falling, these increases had not been matched by improvements in working conditions. Most women continued to be employed in low paid, part-time jobs marked by insecurity, safety and health hazards and to be among the first to lose jobs and the last to be rehired.

18. The patterns of migratory flows of labour had been changing. Women were increasingly involved in international short-term labour migration mainly in domestic work and the entertainment industry. The adoption of restrictive immigration policies by many of the labour-receiving countries had resulted in increased illegal migration, which involved trafficking, mainly of women, and other forms of abuse. Women and girls were more likely than men and boys to become victims of trafficking, in particular if they were poor, uneducated, unskilled or came from ethnic minorities. They often ended up in forced prostitution, exploitative domestic service or working in the manufacturing/production sector under slavery-like conditions.

19. Increased life expectancy combined with lower fertility rates had resulted in the ageing of populations. With the gap in life expectancy between men and women, the number of widows and single women had increased considerably. The rights, needs and obligations of elderly women, particularly in view of signs of weakening in traditional family support systems and diminishing State welfare programmes, did not receive adequate attention in all regions.

20. The progression of the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) epidemic in the developing world had a strong impact on women. The burden of care for people living with HIV as well as care for orphans had fallen on women as State infrastructures had proven inadequate to respond to the challenges posed by the epidemic. Women infected with HIV often suffered from discrimination and stigma. Issues related to mother-to-child transmission, breastfeeding, abortion and partner notification had not been sufficiently addressed.

21. Peace remained the single most important, and most elusive, objective of the international community. Five years after Beijing, there had been an increase in violent conflict. The inter-state wars of the Cold War years had been succeeded by intra-state armed conflicts, often underpinned by political transition, economic dislocation, weak civil society and a weakening of the State, leading to virtual anarchy. Various forces, such as arms and drugs dealers and organized crime syndicates had capitalized on and exacerbated the tensions. The majority of the casualties in recent wars had been civilians, women and children. Targets set for mainstreaming gender considerations in all stages of the peace process remained far from being met.

22. The shift to intra-state armed conflicts and wars had witnessed a frightening increase in gender-based violence. Ironically, just after the recognition of rape as a war crime in 1994, the period from 1995 to the present had witnessed shocking instances of rape as a deliberate weapon of war, particularly in many conflict situations. Other forms of gender-based violence included forced impregnation and the deliberate spread of HIV/AIDS as a means of annihilating the enemy.

C. Constraints to further progress

Equality

23. Despite the emerging focus on issues of masculinity and gender identities, traditional gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards women continued to pose a barrier to gender equality.

24. The growing political rhetoric in support of gender equality was not matched by policies and programmes to make this a reality.

25. The absence of a critical mass of women in decision-making was a major obstacle to moving the agenda forward.

26. The role of the State in enforcing rights and securing social protection for women, children and men was being undermined by the shifts in policy towards liberalization, privatization and deregulation.

27. The absence of democratic culture and rule of law, in some instances, was a continuing constraint to the full enjoyment of human rights, undermining the goal of gender equality.

28. Governments did not pay enough attention to creating enabling conditions for the exercise of men's and women's rights to reproductive and sexual health and free and responsible decisions in matters related to sexuality. In particular, there had been insufficient focus on the interrelated dimensions of male and female experiences of sexuality and reproduction.

29. Current economic strategies were producing inequality and legitimizing this as the price necessary for growth and integration into the global economy. Adjustment costs associated with economic restructuring had increased the economic hardship of the poor and those who were least prepared to

withstand it, in particular poor women. One result of adjustment had been a "disinvestment" in human capabilities. Women's workload inside and outside of the household was increasing and household survival strategies under market conditions were also leading to the extensive use of child labour. Both these factors affected the girl child and adolescent girls.

Development

30. Export-led growth was generally viewed as a panacea for development, with very little critical attention to its negative side effects, especially for the poorest countries. There was an increasing differentiation in the economic situation between and within countries and a danger that the concerns of the poorest countries, where women constituted the poorest of the poor, would be increasingly marginalized.

31. Heavily indebted countries were cutting back on social services to meet debt obligations, with a differential impact on women's access to services and opportunities.

32. The decreasing level of funds available to the international development cooperation programmes and United Nations entities posed a challenge, particularly in developing countries, to the implementation of the Beijing goals.

Peace

33. Even where early warning systems had given ample signals, the political will and ability to act quickly and decisively in averting conflict remained weak. There remained a huge disparity between military expenditure at the national level and the resources set aside at the international level for preventative diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping.

34. The representation of women remained at its lowest levels in all areas pertaining to peace and conflict resolution, including in foreign affairs, defence, permanent missions to the United Nations, the Security Council and peacekeeping missions.

35. Violence against women in all its forms, ranging from domestic to war-related violence, remained a main obstacle to gender equality and the transformation to more democratic, peaceful and just societies.

36. Existing approaches and institutions had proven to be ineffective in the face of increased natural disasters resulting in destruction and displacement. Women, who were, more often than men, charged with the practical tasks of establishing order in a state of disorder, had no support system to fall back on.

D. New opportunities for action

Equality

37. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, a complaint mechanism, strengthens women's ability to seek recourse against discrimination and provides new opportunities to achieve women's human rights and to monitor progress.

38. Increased civil society action to give content to economic, social and cultural rights is providing an opportunity to put into practice an integrated approach to human rights.

39. There is a deeper and more holistic approach to achieving equality, which includes redefining power relationships, strengthening legal enforcement, literacy and reform and overcoming non-legal barriers to equality, including confronting gender stereotypes.

40. Civil society, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are growing stronger and networking across borders to hold corporations as well as Governments and international organizations accountable for social and economic rights.

41. The changing context of gender relations, as well as the discussion of sexuality and reproductive rights, has encouraged some men and groups of men to question their ascribed gender roles and to find new ways to define and live masculinity, opening the way for a new discussion on redefining social relations characterized by patriarchy.

42. There is a renewed debate regarding custom, culture, religious practices and tradition, which offers an opportunity to better understand gender inequality.

Development

43. Parallel to the understanding of the indivisible nature of human rights is an understanding of the integrated political, economic, social, cultural and environmental nature of development. This is an opportunity to forge a powerful human rights and development movement. Economic development will

have meaning only within a social and economic justice and human rights framework. A gender mainstreaming approach has to be combined with a rights-based approach to development: the two are necessary and complementary for achieving true gender equality in sustainable economic and social development.

44. Science and technology are fundamental components of development and are now transforming patterns of production, creating new jobs and ways of working and contributing to the establishment of a knowledge-based society. Technological change brings new opportunities. Many women worldwide are effectively using new communication technologies for networking, advocacy, exchange of information and e-commerce initiatives. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that millions of the world's poorest women and men still do not have access to these facilities and it is important to guard against new forms of exclusion.

45. There is a growing understanding that advancing the status of women is not necessarily predicated on the allocation of new resources, but rather on the way existing resources are allocated. There is now a body of experience with gender budgeting to be drawn upon, which could overcome the danger of symbolic but minimal pockets of money being allocated to "women's projects" and demonstrate the different effects of governmental expenditure on men and women.

46. There is greater understanding that development and human rights for women and men should extend over the entire course of life – from childhood to old age.

Peace

47. The 1990s have witnessed an emergence of vibrant, civil society-based peace movements in which women not only play a role but often have been the key actors. The importance of such non-State actors in supporting and sustaining peace has been demonstrated in countries such as South Africa, where the potential for massive conflict was averted by a combination of skilled leadership and homegrown conflict resolution mechanisms.

48. A more holistic approach to peace has started to emerge. Thinking around gender and decision-making has progressed from merely seeking a "critical mass" of women in such positions, to ensuring that they are able to participate effectively and hence contribute to the transformation of institutions and of society.

49. A more holistic approach to violence against women has also become better understood and applied in practice. The activities of numerous women's networks aim at the eradication of domestic violence and holding national authorities accountable for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women. This has been accompanied by increased efforts at the international level to bring the perpetrators of war-related gender-based crimes to justice, end their immunity and compensate the victims.

III. Action-oriented recommendations

50. The experts found that human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social – provided the essential integrated framework within which to place their recommendations, most of which cut across the three themes of equality, development and peace and the critical areas of concern. In addition, although experts organized their discussions around equality, development and peace, they took note that these themes had been chosen over two decades ago and that the changing context had led to considerable shifts in their meaning. For example, when the word "peace" was used in 1975, the shadow of the Cold War loomed large; "equality" was then still a term that had legalistic and equality of opportunity connotations; and "development" was basically perceived within a needs context. Accordingly, the experts decided to move beyond the themes of equality, development and peace, and to focus on five broad areas where interventions would make, in their view, the most appreciable difference in the coming period.

Attitudes and practices

51. All actors — Governments, international organizations, civil society, political parties, the media and the private sector — should encourage continuous public debate and campaigns on gender-related attitudes, perceptions, stereotypes and inequalities, drawing on the new discussion on the role of men and their responsibilities and the potential for more equal male-female relationships.

52. Actors in the field of education, both formal and informal, should be aware of their key role in

socializing future generations to gender relations without bias and prejudice and should be provided with the necessary tools to fulfil that role.

Governance

53. The actors responsible for governance at the national and international levels should respect, promote and implement norms and commitments and enforce legislation regarding gender equality. The United Nations system should coordinate the work underway on indicators of gender equality so that one set of acceptable, comparable indicators can be used to monitor performance.

54. Governments, international organizations, civil society organizations and corporations should set specific time-bound targets for the achievement of gender equality and meet these targets, in order to achieve gender parity in all areas and levels.

55. All actors should intensify efforts to promote the participation of women in decision-making and leadership positions, especially in political and economic areas. International and national organizations should introduce or strengthen mechanisms for research and training for the empowerment of women.

56. International organizations that shape global governance, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the Group of Seven and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development should introduce gender equality in their decision-making, implementation and evaluation processes, as is being done by the United Nations system and other organizations.

57. International non-governmental organizations and networks, trade unions and consumer associations should play a role in monitoring the implementation of gender equality and core labour standards, including respect for the rights of women workers by international organizations and transnational cooperations.

58. All national and international organizations implementing policies and programmes and disbursing budgets should publicly report on their performance and national and international civil society organizations should be empowered to monitor this performance. There should be systematic gender analysis of budget allocations at all levels, with special emphasis on the reallocation and more effective utilization of existing resources. Good practices in gender budgeting should be shared and used by civil society to monitor the allocation and re-allocation of existing resources to promote gender equality.

59. Governments and international organizations should review and strengthen the mandates and performance of national machineries established to promote gender equality in order to enhance their effectiveness. Their work should be systematically monitored. New mechanisms should be established where they do not exist. In addition, mechanisms to promote gender mainstreaming in other public institutions should be created and synergies between public and non-public institutions promoted.

Alliances and coalitions

60. Governments, international organizations, civil society, political parties, the media and the private sector should further interact and establish new, broad alliances and coalitions within and across countries to promote human rights, codes of conduct and socially responsible investment, which would include gender equality. Such alliances could be forged with trade unions, professional and consumer associations, foundations and others. Promoting dialogue and communication among women should also be encouraged, especially at local and regional levels.

Social and economic justice

61. In the global context of increasing precariousness and vulnerability, affecting, in particular, women in least developed countries and poor women, Governments should take measures to ensure that the role of States in providing social protection and social security is upheld. Governments and international organizations should also increase their efforts to eradicate poverty.

62. All actors should, in the context of the growing trend towards knowledge-based economies, ensure equal participation of women and men in the production, dissemination and application of scientific and technological knowledge, both for achieving gender equality as well as for expanding the pool of talent for better science and technology. In this context, equal access to new technologies and essential drugs should be ensured, including provision of azidothymidine (AZT) for women living with HIV.

63. Governments, the private sector and other actors involved in formal and non-formal education should enable women and men to learn new skills, adjust to rapid technological developments, take on new tasks, switch careers and move between work and training and retraining over the course of their lives. Gender equality in human resource development and life-long learning should be ensured.

64. Governments and law enforcement authorities should address violence against women in all its forms, including "honour crimes", rape and female genital mutilation, as a public offence, subject to public prosecution. Comprehensive legislation to eradicate violence should be introduced where it does not exist. The criminal justice system should be equipped with proper tools to address the issue. Relevant international instruments should be publicized and disseminated and support systems for survivors established.

Peace-building

65. The United Nations should act as a role model by achieving gender parity in all areas related to peace processes, from preventative diplomacy to peace-building, by 2010, and by ensuring that access by women to these processes leads to effective participation and transformation. Member States should be encouraged to make similar tangible commitments to increase the participation of women in all dimensions of peace.

66. International organizations, Governments and other relevant actors should involve women in all stages of the design, planning and implementation of post-conflict transformation as opposed to simply reconstruction. War crimes, especially gender-based violence, should be exposed, investigated and punished. Local peace movements and civil society should be encouraged to promote a culture of peace, human rights and tolerance.

67. All relevant actors should share good practices in all of these areas, especially the planned United Nations study on "Gender Perspectives in Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations", so as to tangibly demonstrate the value of a gender perspective in peace processes.

68. The international and national communities should set voluntary targets for reduction in military spending (e.g. 1 per cent of the gross domestic product by 2005). Monitoring mechanisms to sanction the arms trade and guidelines for investing the resources released in peacekeeping operations and development should be established. In addition, research should be conducted to expose illicit arms dealing and the crime syndicates mushrooming around intra-state wars and to sanction the illegal arms trade through existing international mechanisms.